

HOUSEHOLD, GENDER, AND POLITICAL RESPONSES TO ECONOMIC DOWNTURN: Extending Theories of Mobilization

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Although sociologists have given increased attention to political responses of populations experiencing economic restructuring, existing research remains conceptually limited. Building upon resource mobilization theory and longstanding structural approaches, we extend the conceptual discourse of mobilization by considering alternative bases of action involving the household and its gendered relationships. We provide an empirical example using data from a twelve-state midwestern sample of farm couples during the 1980s farm crisis. In addition to predictors outlined by conventional structural mobilization frameworks, we find that political socialization between spouses (an alternative, generally unexplored base of political action) is an important determinant of action. Relative to men, women tend to exert a more radicalizing political influence on their spouses.

Sociologists have observed varying political responses to rapid economic changes. In some instances, economic restructuring results in widespread mobilization, while in others it is accepted with quiescence and political withdrawal. Current explanations of political responses to restructuring are limited conceptually and most research remains case-study accounts. In this article, we examine the political response of farm couples across the midwestern states during the 1980s farm crisis. We build upon structural theories of mobilization and recent literature that argues for contextualizing political action by attending to household and gender relationships.

Resource mobilization theory provides a starting point for conceptualizing political response to economic crisis. It recognizes that although grievances may be ubiquitous, mobilization is not (McCarthy and Zald 1973; Jenkins 1983). This insight directs attention to the organizational and sociohistorical conditions under which mobilization occurs, connecting resource mobilization to complementary structural approaches. These latter approaches focus on grievance conditions, movement organizational resources,

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individuals' interests in maximizing personal and collective goals, and social structural openings or political opportunities that affect timing and location of mobilization. Farmers and peasants often serve as empirical examples. However, sociologists have long noted limitations of structural approaches, including the need to extend them along a number of lines. These include bases of action related to gender and the household and to political behaviors that reflect more comprehensive responses (Fitzgerald and Rodgers 2000).

A number of scholars have called for broadening both traditional mobilization frameworks and complementary structural approaches. First, critics of structural mobilization theories argue that the consideration of individual-based motivating factors is weak and incomplete (Klandermans 1984; Benford 1993; Skocpol and Campbell 1995; Yang 2000). Second, feminist scholars point out the imposition of gender-stereotyped models and insufficient attention to women's motivating interests (Neuhouser 1998; Herda-Rapp 2000). Third, analysts note a lack of attention to the locale and household as a site of grievances. Researchers on urban social movements, for example, argue for consideration of local grievance conditions, such as policy environment, state service provision, and general community social and economic conditions (Fainstein and Hirst 1995). New social movement theorists similarly argue that domestic and community quality of life concerns are prime sources of current collective action (Inglehart 1990; Brint 1994). Fourth, analysts see the repertoire of political responses as limited. Many structural studies examine willingness to undertake certain political actions rather than actual behavior. There is also little recognition that the meaning and significance of political behaviors vary by contextual setting and social group tradition (Jasper 1997; Goodwin and Jasper 1999; Polletta 1999).

Finally, although structural theories of mobilization are a useful guide for understanding responses to economic restructuring, sociologists have not applied them systematically to this topic. Structural theories are typically applied at the social movement level rather than to the more diffuse political behavior of individuals (Zuo and Benford 1995). However, key concepts in structural mobilization theories, such as grievance motivations and personal and organizational resources, play well-documented roles in individuals' political action and are often used in research on economic restructuring (Perucci, Targ, and Targ 1987; Lasley et al. 1995). In contrast to a coherent social movement, political action during restructuring tends to be more rapid, less coordinated, more individualized, and more localized (Castells 1997). Although restructuring in advanced societies rarely gives rise to full-fledged social movements, concepts related to resource mobilization can be extended to examine variations in individuals' activism.

Our purpose is to extend the mobilization framework by considering alternative bases of action related to the household and gender. We explain how personal, community, and organizational resources, factors considered by traditional resource mobilization, and opportunities and grievances are intertwined with the household and gender. Building from this discussion, we empirically extend traditional structural models in terms of predictors of action. In doing so, we test a more elaborate and gendered model of political action than that addressed in most past studies.

THE HOUSEHOLD AND GENDER AS BASES OF POLITICAL RESPONSE

Most researchers, including structural mobilization theorists, build from assumptions about the individual as a political decision maker or unit of political behavior.

Researchers assume that personally experienced grievances and cost/benefit decision making generate political action (Ennis and Schreuer 1987). Analysts also document the importance of knowing other activists and of social networks (Meyer, Seidler, and MacGillivray 1977; Snow, Zurcher, and Eklund-Olson 1980; Rosenthal et al. 1985; Gould 1993; McAdam and Paulsen 1993). In sum, researchers treat individuals as motivated by personal experiences and networks of friends and acquaintances.

In addition, we stress that individuals are embedded in households that shape personal social positions, identities, grievances, and political decision making. Households also generate their own contested issues and may respond to others from external social forces. In turn, households are embedded in the local community, which is a site of state intervention, social interaction, and economic opportunities for household survival (Zuo and Benford 1995).

Most analysts of political behavior treat the household only implicitly, if at all. Doug McAdam (1986) and Rebecca Klatch (1999) are exceptions; the former documents the importance of parental support while the latter stresses the role of activist parents. However, researchers have neglected the influence of spouses, a critical household component. Studies that jointly examine household, gender, personal attributes, and community context are rare. We examine how these factors affect political responses during the greatest crisis in farming since the Great Depression (Stam, Koenig, Bentley, and Gale 1991).

The Household as a Site of Grievances

The household, rather than the individual, is crucial for determining responses to economic restructuring, because it is a basic unit in social stratification and determinant of class identity (Dickinson and Russell 1986; Wallerstein and Smith 1991). The differential class location of households means experiences of economic restructuring and thus political grievances vary across households (Klatch 1999). Indeed, state intervention to counter consumption decline, such as through social welfare programs, centers on the household.

The household also is the day-to-day setting in which members cope with economic change and make political decisions. Researchers use the concept of family adaptive strategy to highlight the family as an active social participant that reworks external constraints and opportunities (Moen and Wethington 1992; Barlett, Lobao, and Meyer 1999). A large literature documents adaptive strategies due to hardship, such as increasing workloads and cutting back on consumption (Lobao and Meyer 1995a; Nelson and Smith 1999; Meyer and Lobao 2003). Case studies in other nations often find household survival strategies related to political action, indicating this potential relationship for U.S. populations (Friedmann and Rangan 1993; Entwistle and Henderson 2000).

Finally, the household connects its members to local social context via day-to-day interactions in communities. Communities provide distinct grievances, resources, networks, and traditions of activism (Winson 1993). Studies of farm and peasant movements note that the mutual dependencies of agrarian life create similar worldviews about community and locally based attachments, which can be sources of mobilization during crisis (Howe 1986).

Although household attributes have been considered determinants of women's political behavior, they are generally neglected in the case of men. Past researchers tended to analyze men and women from different models, assuming that personal attributes, such as occupation, outweighed household attributes for men, with the opposite relationship posed for women (Sorenson 1994). In contrast, case studies suggest that everyday household-related conditions and activities affect both men's and women's political activism (Singerman 1995).

Internal Relations within the Household: Differences by Gender

The household is also important due to *its internal social relations*. Women's distinct social position in the household suggests that their political interests, behavior, and experiences of economic restructuring should differ from their spouses (Buechler 1993). Gender also impacts political behavior, including movement success and life-course histories (Van Dyke, McAdam, and Wilhelm 2000; McCammon et al. 2001).

There are two alternative views on how internal household factors influence women vis-à-vis men. First, as S.A. Peterson (1990) notes, older conventional models often refer to women's household position as inhibiting their activism: domestic or multiple work burdens that limit free time and foster isolation, and social norms are notable deterrents. In contrast, more recent feminist perspectives see women's household position as a base of activism, particularly in nonconventional politics. Women's responsibility for household reproduction indicates they may be particularly sensitive to grievances related to family consumption downturns (Lobao and Meyer 1991). Similarly, L.A. Tilly and P. Gurin (1990) argue that women's distinct gender-related experiences create "solidarities of everyday life" that facilitate collective action.

A related issue is the extent to which women's position and views influence their spouses. While some analysts find that husbands influence wives' activism, the reverse is little analyzed. Peterson (1990), however, notes that there is likely a "mutual socialization" of spouses with regard to political views and voting preferences.

In sum, we expect the household to impact political behavior for a number of reasons. Households occupy distinct class locations, face various hardships, utilize different adaptive strategies, and possess varying resources, thereby influencing how grievances touch individual members. Households connect individuals to community restructuring conditions. Within the household, gender relations are defined, which may provide distinct bases of political action for men and women. Mutual political socialization also takes places in the household.

THE 1980S FARM CRISIS

The farm population in the 1980s provides an empirical example for elaborating how household-based grievances, personal resources and support, and gender affects political behavior. Analysts attribute the 1980s farm crisis to a number of events, structurally and temporally specific. The crisis had an uneven effect across regions and farm households. By the mid-1980s, the U.S. Comptroller General (1985) estimated half of all commercial-sized farms (about 310,000) were financially insolvent, 60 percent of them located in the agriculturally dependent midwestern states. The Midwest was hardest hit,

in part due to specialization in cash grains, which experienced declining exports. Family-operated, commercial units that were less able to handle high debt loads and younger, more highly leveraged farmers were particularly vulnerable.

Accounts of farm foreclosures, farm protests, and disrupted family life made headline news through the 1980s (Malcolm 1986; Davidson 1990; Miller 1993). By and large, however, aggressive reactions to the crisis were sporadic, and no full-fledged, recognizable farmers' movement emerged (Mooney and Majka 1995). The absence of a coherent farmers' movement was notable because other severe downturns had resulted in mid-western movements up to World War II (Saloutos and Hicks 1951; Morlan 1955; Shover 1965; McNall 1988). Since that period, however, four factors diminished activism. New Deal legislation reduced risk and regularized farm income, thereby alleviating much severe financial pressure. Second, the farm population declined from about one-quarter of all Americans in 1940 to under 2 percent today (Lobao and Meyer 2001). Third, as agrarian class structure has become differentiated, political interests are more divergent and less prone to the galvanizing effects of crisis (Howe 1986). Farmers' interests are fragmented further by organizations arising out of farm differentiation, such as marketing cooperatives and commodity associations (Hansen 1991). In short, there is a segmentation of agrarian identities and bases for mobilization relative to the past.

Although the 1980s produced no coherent political movement, individual farmers varied in political activism. Our purpose is to examine the origins of that activism.

Grievances: The Farm Household and Its Community Context

We expect that grievances related to the farm household that stem from class, financial hardship, participation in government programs, and community socioeconomic conditions will promote farmers' political action. Farm enterprises continue to be largely family owned and operated. Though this confers a general petty-bourgeois class location, farm households empirically occupy a range of class locations. Farm size, a corollary of class location, divides farmers in their political interests and activities and reflects differential treatment by the government (Guither and Halerow 1988; NASB 2003, p. 54). Historically, larger farms received more government subsidies and were more active politically (Mooney 1986). Because the farm household is a unit of production and consumption, enterprise downturns directly affect the household and call for a collective response, which may include external political action.

In addition to grievances directly related to the farm-household unit, farm households are embedded in a local context that may be expected to influence individual members' activism. Community attributes, particularly local economic and social conditions, may be sources of grievances and bases for activism. The importance of land as a factor of production in farming means most of today's farmers are descendants of earlier farmers (Salamon 1993). They tend to reside near their community of origin and attach great importance to their landed legacy and community. The 1980s crisis not only affected farms but also other local businesses as well as community social structure and traditions, such as neighboring and mutual aid (Elder and Conger 2000; Lobao and Meyer 2001). Farmers' political behavior thus is likely influenced not only by household and personal grievances but also by community downturn, loss of local social traditions, and other structural elements of the locale.

Internal Household Support and Gender Relationships

Social relations internal to the farm household, particularly those based on gender, may influence individuals' activism in two major ways. First, women and men may vary in the types of farm-household grievances that serve as motivating factors. For example, women may be motivated by grievances related to affording appropriate food and clothing for the family, while men may be more motivated by declines in cash payments for agricultural products. Second, as the household is a context for political socialization, factors related to political action should be mutually reinforcing between spouses.

Women and men share common motivating factors related to farm-household survival but also have distinct interests resulting from their structural positions and experiences. While the gender division of farm labor varies by enterprise and other characteristics, men have long retained greater control over management decisions (Rosenfeld 1985; Barlett 1993; Lobao and Meyer 1995b). Women's distinct roles in farming, household reproduction, and as mediators between household and community suggest that farm women, as argued for women overall, may have a "moral framework of public life" (Baker 1991) that differs from men. In sum, although farm-household, community, personal, and organizational predictors are expected for both men and women, the *pattern* of these relationships may vary by gender.

Until recently, most studies of farmers' political activity centered on the farm operator, a position assigned by researchers and government officials to the male (Taylor 1953; Dyson 1986).¹ This traditional literature suggests that farm men are more likely to influence women's political behavior than vice versa. Although farm women participated in turn-of-the-century protest movements such as the Populist Party and Farmers' Alliance (Miller and Neth 1988), Deborah Fink (1986, p. 24) notes that they were largely in subordinate positions. As the state accommodated agricultural interests, male farmers, through local farm organizations, secured federal interventions to protect farm and family welfare. Male-dominated local organizations resulted in a corporatist style of interest-group politics that tended to preserve vested economic interests.

The previous literature on farm women and households provides two insights about how determinants of political behavior should be conceptualized. First, the differential experience of farming by gender implies that political behavior should be analyzed through separate models for men and women. A single model that assumes homogeneity of factors related to political behavior neglects the distinct experiences and structural positions of farm women and men and therefore factors that may give rise to different patterns of political response. Second, literature on non farm populations suggests the possibility of a "household support function" in which individuals' political responses are shaped by other household members. Thus, in contrast to the traditional literature stressing a male model of farmers' activism, there is every reason to expect that characteristics of the operator affect the political behavior of the spouse and vice versa. Where women are members of farm organizations, they should be engaged in farm-related political action and have greater influence over spouses' activism as well. As noted by Jacqueline Adams (2000) and Rory McVeigh and David Sikkink (2001), the household can supplement the mobilizing motivation nurtured within organizations.

Traditional Structural Mobilization Frameworks: Personal Resources and Organizational Factors

Structural mobilization frameworks have long outlined key personal and organizational determinants of political responses. Personal attributes, such as age and education, are common correlates of political behavior, with older age and higher education generally associated with greater resources, political interest, and hence, greater activism, particularly in conventional politics (Hall, Rodeghier, and Useem 1986). Age and education also connote social asset accumulation and community integration over the life cycle. Organizational membership is a key factor in structural mobilization frameworks and important here because farm organizations provided concerted outreach to farmers and had heavy meeting attendance during the crisis. In general, women and men who are members of farm organizations should be more active in politics, although this may vary by the type of group, such as commodity, general farm organizations, or farm political action groups. Finally, individuals' sense of communal support for activism should also influence political behavior (Chong 1991). This is particularly likely in the case of farmers, whose landed legacy, agrarian cognitive frames, and past history of mobilization ties them to community norms of collective action.

HYPOTHESES

We examine three sets of determinants of political behavior. First, we extend traditional individual-based conceptualization of grievance motivators to the household level and our distinct population. "Farm-household grievances" incorporate variables specific to the unit (farm social class or enterprise size, farm debt-load, participation in government programs, and financial hardships). We also treat grievances emerging from farm-household embeddedness in the community (personal ties with community and community financial well-being). Treating the previous factors as grievance motivators, we hypothesize that larger enterprises, higher debt-load, greater use of government programs, greater financial hardships, and perceived declines of neighboring and community well-being, should be positively related to political action.

Second, we examine "internal household support" through attributes of spouses that affect their mutual political socialization. As noted, spouses' attributes are largely unanalyzed by previous quantitative studies. Particularly important are spouses' organizational memberships and education (a major predictor of political activity). We hypothesize that spouse's organizational membership and higher education should be positively related to political action.

Third, "personal resources and organizational factors," found in traditional structural mobilization frameworks, should be positively related to political response. These include personal characteristics, such as age, education, support networks, and the farm organizations to which the respondent belongs.

We expect that all three sets of factors influence both men's and women's political action. However, the pattern of relationships is expected to vary by gender. Because of their differential position in farming, men's political behavior is expected to be more influenced by enterprise-related grievances of class, financial position, and local economic situation.

DATA AND METHODS

Sample

We used a simple, random sample of midwestern farm couples surveyed in 1989. The sample was selected from the population list of all farms in the twelve midwestern states. One questionnaire was directed to the main, self-defined operator of the farm, the other to the spouse. In addition to containing overlapping items, the operators' questionnaire gave special attention to the farm-household division of labor and family stresses and networks. In surveys of farm couples, it is customary to ask one partner to provide farm production information, such as sales and acreage, or information based on household records (Lasley et al. 1995). This is to avoid overburdening respondents and because production data from both respondents would be unnecessarily redundant. Only households with both spouses answering their questionnaires were included in the analysis. The sample size is 2,555 farm couples.²

Political Participation

We asked respondents to report their political participation over the past five years, following conceptualizations that view political behavior as discrete categories, such as the Citizen Participation Study (Verba et al. 1993). Respondents reported whether or not they attended public meetings, talked or wrote to government officials, signed petitions, became active in political groups, and participated in protests over farm foreclosures. These behaviors, commonly used indicators of political action, represent a mix of conventional activities (signing petitions, writing letters, attending meetings, and participating in political groups) and nonconventional activities (protest). We eliminated voting in the last election because almost all farmers voted. Our data are limited in that we have only one nonconventional behavior indicator, farm protest. However, this is the primary form of non-conventional behavior that occurred during the farm crisis, and it is relevant to both men and women.

Frequencies of political behaviors are 72.10 percent for men and 46.50 percent for women in public meeting attendance, 42.20 percent for men and 32.50 percent for women in personal communication with public officials, 49.50 percent for men and 49.60 percent for women in signing petitions, 16.30 percent for men and 14.58 percent for women in becoming active in political groups, and 1.90 percent for men and 1.50 percent for women in participation in farm foreclosure protest. Men attended significantly more public meetings and communicated significantly more with public officials; differences of proportions tests for those two variables yielded significance at the .01 level, with two-tailed tests.

We treat measures of political participation in *two ways* following Peterson (1990). First, scores are assigned based on the number of the activities in which respondents participated (e.g., if a respondent signed a petition and attended rallies but nothing else, his/her score is 2). The scoring yields an index of political activity ranging from 0–5. Most respondents report one or two activities. Men are slightly more active than women: 69 percent of the men and 77 percent of the women report two or fewer activities. Less than 1 percent of women or men report participating in all five activities.

Second, we examine protest in more depth as a separate, dichotomous variable. Protest falls outside the sphere of routine political actions, such as signing petitions and

writing letters (Verba et al. 1993; Schlozman et al. 1994; 1995) and fewer farmers engaged in it.

Independent Variables

Three sets of variables are expected to affect political participation: grievances related to the farm household and community, internal household support, and personal/organizational factors important to conventional models of political behavior.

Grievances Related to the Farm Household and the Community

To assess grievances, we employ six variables indicating farm-household economic position and hardships as well as perceived changes in the local setting. The farm operators' survey contains production items involving gross farm sales, debt/asset ratio, use of government farm programs, financial hardship, and local agricultural financial situation.

As noted, changes in community social traditions and financial conditions may be sources of grievances stemming from the local context in which households are embedded. To tap changes in local social cohesiveness, we use a scale measuring changes in the quality of "neighboring" that is composed of three items: "Neighboring over the past five years has . . .," "Neighbors helping each other over the past five years has . . .," and "The things you have in common with people in your community. . . ." Responses are coded into five Likert-type categories from "become much better" to "become much worse." Cronbach's alpha is .84. Women's and men's perceptions of neighboring differ only slightly and not significantly (mean for women = 2.88, s.d. = 1.80; mean for men = 2.86, s.d. = 1.84). "Local financial situation" is measured by a three-item scale using the operators' appraisal of the financial situation of local agribusiness firms, farms, and lenders. The alpha for this scale is .80 (mean is 2.51, s.d. = 1.15).

"Gross farm sales" is a class-related indicator, preferred over other measures of scale, such as acreage, which vary by commodity. Gross farm sales correlates with other class-related indicators, such as hired labor use and less dependency on off-farm income. Higher gross farm sales indicate a greater stake in farming as a livelihood strategy and the need for more complex, potentially stressful management adaptations to changing conditions. Farms are placed into one of seven categories commonly used by the Agricultural Census; categories range from (1) sales under \$10,000 to (5) sales of \$250,000 and over. The use of these categories reduces respondents' reluctance to provide precise income information while still capturing a range of standard size categories. The mean is 2.79 with a standard deviation of .06.

The "debt/asset ratio" indicates a farm's capacity for debt absorption and asset liquidation, which affects flexibility in financial management. The debt/asset ratio, developed by David H. Harrington (1985) and routinely used by economists, is measured by the total amount of real estate and non real estate debt over asset value. Classification categories that denote degree of financial stress are (1) under 40 percent, no apparent financial problems, (2) 40 percent–70 percent, serious financial problems, (3) 71 percent–100 percent, extreme financial problems, and (4) over 100 percent, technically insolvent. In the case of our midwestern sample, farms with higher gross farm sales have higher debt-to-asset ratios.³ The mean is 1.96, s.d. = 1.03.

"Participation in government farm programs" indicates a family's external dependence on eligibility for government subsidies. Dependency on government programs may increase activism, as established membership provides priority status for claiming federal subsidies and reasons for pressuring government during economic downturns. This variable is a summated index of utilization of six government programs, each ranging from high (3) to (1) no utilization. The mean is 3.89, standard deviation = .59.

"Financial hardship" is a commonly used index (Bultena, Lasley, and Geller 1986; Conger and Elder 1994; Lobao and Meyer 1995a) of thirteen adjustments made by farm households in the past five years due to financial need, such as postponing major farm purchases, postponing major household purchases, changing food or eating patterns to save money, purchasing more on credit, and postponing medical care. A simple additive index of "yes" responses factored into a single dimension. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this measure is .82. The mean is 4.54, s.d. = 3.46.

Since grievances, such as financial hardship, may be related to structural features of households, there is the possibility of endogeneity in our models. We examined this possibility by excluding financial hardship and rerunning the models. The results reported here remain stable in direction and significance, whether or not financial hardship is included.

Personal Resources and Organizational Factors

Personal variables are those routinely used in research on citizens' political participation (e.g., Dalton 1988; Inglehart 1990). They include age, education, organizational memberships and informal support networks. Age is measured in years. Median age for women is 47, s.d. = 12.43, and for men, 50, s.d. = 12.58. Age is highly correlated with another variable not included in the analysis: years in farming. In addition to indicating farm experience, age reflects attachment to the land and locale. Education is measured by a seven-point scale ranging from none (1) to graduate school (7). Median schooling was completion of high school for men and one additional year for women (men = 12.42, s.d. = 2.46; women = 12.86, s.d. = 2.17).

Farmers' organizational memberships are divided into three categories following Rosenfeld (1985): (1) traditional farm organizations, such as the Farm Bureau, Grange, National Farmers Union, Young Farmers and Farm Wives, National Farmers Organization, (2) commodity producers' associations, such as the American Dairy Association or National Wheat Producers Association, and (3) farm political action groups, such as a state Family Farm Movement or the National Save the Family Farm Coalition. The last group represents progressive alternatives to long-standing farm organizations, with many political action groups forming specifically to address the farm crisis. Membership in political action groups could be interpreted as a means to action and therefore a variable different from the other organizational indicators. We performed analyses with and without this indicator. Since including this variable has little effect on other relationships and since it denotes organizations that played key roles in the crisis, we retain it. Respondents' memberships are coded in dichotomy. Means for memberships are traditional farm organizations, .46 (s.d. = .50) for men and .37 (s.d. = .48) for women; commodity producer associations, .20 (s.d. = .40) for men and .11 (s.d. = .31) for women; and farm political action groups .01 (s.d. = .11) for men and .01 (s.d. = .09) for women.

Structural mobilization theories often identify informal support networks as a predictor of social behavior. Communal support includes social links with church, school, in-laws, and members of extended families. It is measured by the sum of church affiliates, close friends, close relatives, and people who will help in times of trouble. The mean of communal support was 3.08 (s.d. = 3.09) with a range of 1–4. We note that this is not a measure of community militancy but rather it assesses embeddedness in the community social support structure. Households experiencing stronger communal support should be more likely to take the risks of activism. We expect communal support to be a stronger predictor in women's models than in men's since men tend to network through business and political groups, identified above as organizational memberships.

Internal Household, Gender-Based Support

Expecting that farm couples arrive at political decisions in the context of family relationships, we include spouses' variables as well as grievances, personal resources, and community integration. We use the variables described previously. Men's memberships in traditional farm, commodity, or political action organizations and education are used as corresponding spouses' variables in women's models and vice versa. For example, men's traditional farm organization membership is the measure for spouses' membership in the women's models; women's farm organization membership is spouses' traditional farm organization membership in the men's models. Since previous quantitative studies rarely include spouses' indicators as independent variables, there is little empirical precedent for establishing direction of these variables. We expect spouses' variables should influence both men's and women's political behavior and that the direction should be similar to that for personal variables: for example, higher education of both spouse and the individual should be related to the individual's greater political activism.

Statistical Method and Models

The personal and organizational variables used in this study are of the type and scope used in quantitative studies examining individuals' political action. Because variables reflecting household grievances and spouses' variables are rarely included in models of political action, our models incorporate a more comprehensive set of predictors than most other studies.⁴ We also tested whether other variables might affect political participation. Because the models are already lengthy and detailed, where possible, we omitted variables with no significant effects and/or that are not germane to our conceptual purpose. For example, off-farm employment and farmland owned are omitted for they had little effect on political behavior or other relationships. As we use survey data, one limitation is that we do not have life history data, such as personal background prior to becoming a farm spouse, precise measures of individuals' group identification, or content of spouses' interactions in the home.

We present our analyses in two ways: ordinary least squares regression of the summed political participation variable and binary logistic regression analyses of a model of political protest. Separate models for women and men are examined in both analyses to explore distinct patterns predicting activities by gender. The decision to analyze gendered models rests on guidance from the literature (Schlozman et al. 1994; 1995) and a

significant Chow test that we used as suggestive, since men and women here are in same households with consequent lack of independence between the two groups.

In the OLS analysis, no variance inflation factor exceeds 2.469, indicating no collinearity problems. The logistic regression analysis employed LIMDEP7. As noted above, models were examined with and without household financial hardship and political action group membership. Exclusion or inclusion of these variables did not affect the direction or significance of predictors. With regard to political behavior, levels of participation are generally higher than national and gender sample surveys. Our findings should be conservative in their inferences because actual reported participation, not potential, is studied.

FINDINGS

Ordinary Least Squares Regression

OLS regression results for the summated participation index by gender are shown in Table 1. In the men's model (column 1), grievances reflecting financial conditions of the farm household, namely, gross farm sales, participation in government programs, and financial hardship, were better predictors than grievances related to the local community context, that is, neighboring and the financial situation of the area. This finding confirms hypotheses suggested in the structural mobilization literature. For men, participatory activity increases with personal resources and integration into organizational and community networks: older age and higher education, informal communal support networks, and traditional farm and commodity organization memberships are significant predictors. Political action group membership has little effect on participation.

Hypotheses regarding spousal influences are supported in two variables. Men engage in more activities when they have more educated spouses and spouses who belong to political action groups. Explained variance for the men's model is 15 percent, which approximates typical models of political behavior in populations more heterogeneous than farmers (Peterson 1990).

In the women's model (column 3), participation is related to a similar set of grievance variables, personal resource variables, and organizational and community integration variables. In particular, grievances reflecting the financial situation of the household are more important than grievances related to the community context. Older age, greater education, use of informal communal support networks, and traditional farm and commodity organization memberships are significant predictors. For women, membership in a political action group also strongly predicts their political participation. Spousal influence is apparent in one variable: spouse's commodity organization membership. Variance explained in the women's model is about 15 percent.

Comparing coefficients in men's and women's models (column 5), we do not find support for the hypothesis that grievances reflecting enterprise-related attributes, such as financial status and farm size class, are more predictive for men. None of the grievance variables are significantly more important to men than to women. Regarding personal resources, education is significantly more important to women's political action than men's. Membership in political action groups clearly influences women more than it does men.

There are significant differences in spousal influences for several variables: women whose spouses belong to commodity organizations participate significantly more than

TABLE 1. REGRESSION OF SUMMATED PARTICIPATION BY SEX ON GRIEVANCES, INTERNAL HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT, AND PERSONAL RESOURCES AND ORGANIZATIONAL/COMMUNITY VARIABLES

	Men		Women		Difference b
	b	β	b	β	
Grievances: the farm household and community context					
Neighboring	.006 (.657)	.012	-.006 (-.582)	-.011	.012
Financial situation of area	-.018 (-.877)	-.017	-.009 (-.420)	-.008	-.009
Gross farm sales	.136*** (6.208)	.130	.083*** (3.781)	.079	.053
Debt/asset ratio	.004 (.158)	.003	-.022 (-.832)	-.018	.026
Participation in government programs	.017* (2.226)	.044	.017* (2.191)	.043	.000
Financial hardship	.034*** (4.427)	.094	.035*** (4.521)	.096	-.001
Internal household support					
Spouse's traditional farm organization membership	-.013 (-.497)	-.013	.007 (.305)	.008	-.020
Spouse's commodity organization membership	-.003 (-.124)	-.003	.073*** (3.447)	.085	-.076*
Spouse's political action group membership	.195** (2.790)	.053	-.013 (-.164)	-.003	.208*
Spouse's education	.054*** (4.395)	.094	.009 (.808)	.018	.045**
Personal resources and organizational factors					
Age	.007*** (3.316)	.072	.010*** (4.595)	.099	-.003
Education	.036** (3.179)	.070	.081*** (6.546)	.141	-.045**
Traditional farm organization memberships	.147*** (6.140)	.163	.154*** (5.803)	.152	-.007
Commodity organization membership	.137*** (6.541)	.160	.088*** (3.416)	.084	.049
Political action group membership	-.054 (-.699)	-.013	.380*** (5.395)	.102	-.434***
Communal support	.021** (2.740)	.052	.034*** (4.380)	.084	-.013
Constant	-.899		-1.169		
R ²	.154		.147		
N	2555.000		2555.000		

T values are in parentheses; *significant at $p < .05$, **significant at $p < .01$, ***significant at $p < .001$, two-tailed tests.

men whose spouses belong to such groups. Spouse's education and spouse's political action group membership are significantly more important to men than to women.

To summarize, hypotheses from structural mobilization approaches and related literatures are supported: political participation is influenced by grievances (particularly those related to the farm household) and by resources of age, education, organizational ties, and communal support. Because these variables reflect personal factors and household economic circumstances, one might expect them to be closely linked with participation during crisis. Net of these major variables, however, there is evidence of spousal effects. Women who are more educated and participate in political action groups significantly affect their spouses' activism. When men belong to commodity organizations, their spouses' political activism increases.

Logistic Regression

In analysis not shown here, we explored the individual patterns of variation in each of the five political behaviors by gender using logistic regression. The findings displayed in Table 1 reflect largely the pattern of variables that explains the common, conventional political behaviors of farmers, such as public meeting attendance, communicating with a public official, signing petitions, and becoming active in politics.

The pattern of variables that promotes protest behavior is somewhat different and more parsimonious. Although only a small percentage of farmers engaged in protest, we examine this behavior in Table 2 to demonstrate factors that galvanized more radical farmers and to further explore the apparently more radicalizing influence of women on men, as found in Table 1.

Table 2 shows that political protest is related to financial hardship for both men and women. The lived experience of struggling with economic problems is an important determinant of protest for both genders. Women's organizational membership in traditional farm and political action groups also predicts their protest activity (column 2). However, activism is mitigated when women's spouses are members of conventional organizations, such as the Farm Bureau, Grange, and National Farmers Organization. This suggests that a patriarchal gender effect operates in which men's traditional farm interests channeled wives' political action away from nonconventional forms of expression. In the men's model (column 1), personal organizational memberships have little effect on their protest activity. However, spouses' influences on men are apparent. Women's membership in political action groups, such as a state Family Farm Movement or the National Save the Family Farm Coalition, has a radicalizing effect on their spouses.

Comparing men's and women's coefficients (column 3), women's engagement in protest appears prompted by personal membership in organizations, significantly more so than men's. Also, women's activism is significantly more restrained by having a spouse who belongs to a traditional farm organization. In contrast, men's activism is radicalized when their spouses belong to political action groups, but the opposite does not occur for women's activism.

In sum, there is some evidence that men's high risk activism is buttressed by internal household support from progressive-oriented, politically active wives, while women's conventional behavior is related to the gendered nature of farm households in which men's corporatist farm interests and organizational affiliations spill over to wives' responses.

**TABLE 2. PARTICIPATION IN PROTEST AGAINST FARM FORECLOSURE:
UNSTANDARDIZED LOGISTIC REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS**

	Men	Women	Difference
Grievances: the farm household and community context			
Neighboring	.000 (.003)	-.032 (-.499)	.032
Financial situation of area	-.031 (-.222)	.086 (.538)	-.117
Gross farm sales	-.084 (-.591)	-.053 (-.319)	-.031
Debt/asset ratio	.034 (.214)	.041 (.227)	-.007
Participation in government programs	.016 (.338)	-.008 (-.154)	.024
Financial hardship	.142** (2.985)	.250*** (4.434)	-.108
Internal household support			
Spouse's traditional farm organization membership	.061 (.383)	-.485** (-2.599)	.546*
Spouse's commodity organization membership	-.074 (-.494)	-.047 (-.284)	-.027
Spouse's political action group membership	.903*** (4.185)	-.529 (-.935)	1.432*
Spouse's age	.004 (.108)	.006 (.139)	-.002
Spouse's education	-.017 (-.212)	-.085 (-1.024)	.068
Personal resources and organizational factors			
Age	.010 (.253)	.009 (.190)	.001
Education	.054 (.783)	-.021 (-.221)	.075
Traditional farm organization memberships	.085 (.564)	.600** (3.241)	-.515*
Commodity organization membership	.075 (.583)	.172 (1.042)	-.097
Political action group membership	-.161 (-.438)	.968*** (4.254)	-1.129**
Communal support	-.056 (-1.161)	.005 (.101)	-.061
Constant	-5.345** (-2.906)	-5.313** (-2.431)	
Log-likelihood	-225.548	-167.299	
Likelihood ratio statistic (c2)	33.448 ⁺	60.659 ⁺	
Concordant percentage	69.80	78.50	
Degrees of freedom	17	17	
N	2555.000	2555.000	

T values are in parentheses; ⁺ p < .001 for model as a whole; *significant at p < .05, **significant at p < .01, ***significant at p < .001, two-tailed tests.

DISCUSSION

Sociologists are increasingly interested in the political response of populations experiencing economic downturns. Conceptual development of this topic, however, remains limited. In part, this is because research tends to be largely case-study oriented and focused on distinct events that call for idiographic interpretations rather than building from long-standing political sociological perspectives. Further, while a large economic and political sociological tradition links class and economic factors to activism, much of this centers on workers rather than households. We extend structural mobilization frameworks by considering how determinants are contingent on household and gender-related factors and how they operate during periods of economic downturn.

Farming in the 1980s provides a useful empirical example. Shifts in global markets for farm products, long-term domestic structural change, and temporally specific financial downturns resulted in massive disruption of a traditional economic sector. Among the farm population in the late 1980s, we find continued support for traditional factors defined by structural mobilization theories and individual-based perspectives. However, these relationships are connected to the household and its gendered context. First, as structural mobilization theories indicate, grievances affect political behavior. We extend this notion to show that individuals' grievances have underlying household bases that are shaped by shared hardships and economic status.

Second, following other research, we find that individuals' personal and organizational characteristics affect their political behavior. We extend this common finding to show that similar characteristics referring to the spouse also affect individuals' behavior. This indicates mutual political socialization within the household and, in a sense, the existence of a "household support function" that factors into individuals' personal decisions about political activity. The finding of mutual spousal influence also challenges conventional perspectives that assume that men have greater influence over women than vice versa. Gendered relationships within the farm household are not simple reflections of a patriarchal culture.

Third, extending focus to the household and gender provides a more comprehensive understanding of how people respond to downturns. The need for households to adapt to economic crisis, financial resources, personal characteristics, and household support networks are intertwined with spousal relationships. Our findings show that political action, particularly conventional behaviors, emerges in households that make multiple adjustments to hardship, where ties with supportive others are strong and where family members are affiliated with organizations. These findings provide quantitative support for mobilizing factors thus far outlined mainly in case studies of economic restructuring.

Fourth, our findings point to the need for studies to question empirically the extent to which bases of political action vary by gender. Within categories of grievances, personal motivators, organizational affiliations, and household gender context, we find both overlap and variation by gender. For women, political action group membership influenced their own, radical political behavior and increased spouses' activist involvements. For men, membership in conventional farm groups was associated with their routine political behavior. When men's organizational affiliations influenced their wives' activity, traditional responses were manifest.

Our research highlights a need for an elaboration of structural mobilization frameworks that includes consideration of the household and its gendered relationships.

Individuals are impacted by economic restructuring differently, according to household characteristics. Households confer differential identities and resources. Finally, households are characterized by internal gendered relationships that influence political actors' responses to restructuring.

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NOTES

1. A substantial literature details the treatment of the farm operation as a male-headed enterprise for the purpose of data collection, such as through the Census of Agriculture and other official statistics and through empirical studies, particularly by economists (see Sachs 1983; 1996 for reviews).

2. For further details about the survey, see Lasley et al. (1995). The population list from which the North Central sample is drawn is the most comprehensive list of farms available. In order to assemble this list, we solicited independent cooperation from each of the twelve state Agricultural Statistics Service directors. The response rate to the survey was 45 percent. A follow-up telephone survey of nonrespondents revealed that farm sizes, debt-to-asset levels, and income levels were similar to the respondent sample and, thus, there was no evidence of systematic response bias.

3. Nationally, mid-sized farms were often portrayed as having the highest financial stress during the crisis. Our sample shows a linear relationship because midwestern farms tend to be smaller than those in some regions, such as the West, and are more dependent on cash grains, with larger farms more jeopardized, as the crisis was more likely to affect cash-grain operators.

4. The addition of the variables reflecting household grievances and spouses' variables have rarely been included in models of political action, which makes our models more fully identified than other studies. As there are no other existing quantitative studies of farm women's and men's political action during the farm crisis, our selection of independent variables was widely cast, centering on key variables identified as predictors of political action in other studies and including additional variables on the spouse and household that other studies have neglected and variables (such as household hardship and community neighboring) that have been identified in qualitative studies as impacting action during the farm crisis.

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